

Professional Development of Teachers: Learning from Singapore's Teacher Education System

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the Teacher Education practices followed in Singapore which make it one of the best education systems in the world. In this paper, Teacher Education of Singapore is viewed from three various areas, that are, pre-teacher training phase, pre-service teacher training phase and in-service teacher training phase. The aim of this paper is to learn from Singapore's teacher education system and incorporate the learnings needed in a particular education system based on their local needs and demographics.

1. Introduction

21st century Education ("21st Century Competencies," n.d.) requires a framework of knowledge which is imperative for its success. However, very little can be achieved in this direction unless Teacher Education is made congruent with these frameworks. The high degree of dissatisfaction towards the teaching profession and teacher attrition rate that we witness today lays heavy responsibility on the shoulders of Teacher Education system, both Pre-service and In-service, to address this.

It has been concluded that the probable reasons why early career teachers leave (Johnson, Down, Cornu, ..., & 2014, n.d.) are a feeling of self-doubt, emotional exhaustion and burnout. Other reasons identified are lack of job satisfaction, low motivation, low salary, dissatisfaction with respect to working condition and lack of support from administration (Ingersoll, 2001).

Untouched by this painful global fact, as per Organization for Economic Corporation and Development (OECD), Singapore owns the most successful education system in the world with most stable and competent teachers ("Singapore: Rapid Improvement followed by Strong Performance," 2010), with teacher attrition rate in Singapore being only 3%. (Ministry of Education, Singapore n.d.)

Research shows, in Singapore, even after 4 years of Teacher Training, teachers still had the connect and the belief in contribution. They were still working for the larger purpose of teaching and not just their salaries and immediate benefits. (Chong & Low, 2009).

In Singapore, apart from being regarded as a highly respected profession, teaching profession also demands all professional ethos from teachers. They have to demonstrate highest degree of knowledge of learning, knowledge of curriculum and knowledge of how to teach the curriculum to learners.

In light of the above facts, this paper attempts to look into the factors that make Singapore's teacher education system the best in the world. This paper analyses Singapore's Teacher education with respect to Pre-teacher training, Pre-Service training and In-Service training.

2. Methodology

This paper is a study based on secondary data from various research articles published in international journals, reports, official websites and books on Education system and Teacher Education in Singapore.

3. Teacher training in Singapore

At Organizational level, Teacher Education in Singapore is managed by the Ministry of Education (MoE), National Institute of Education (NIE) and the Schools.

Ministry of Education lays down the Policies and Frameworks for Teacher Education, NIE, the sole Teacher Education provider of the country, designs Teacher Education programmes as per the policies and frameworks provided by MoE, while the schools act as the links that bridge the gap between theory and practice. Schools are responsible for the development of teachers as professionals based on the guidelines provided by NIE. ("Home | National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore," n.d.)

Teacher Training in Singapore can be divided into following 3 parts:

Pre-Teacher Training

As per the Ministry of Education, Singapore law, any candidate wanting to go for pre-service teacher training has to gain a compulsory short-term Field experience of in a Singapore school.

The purpose of this is that the candidates should have a

true idea of their passion for teaching, they can access their motivation to take up teaching as a profession and know their belief systems.

During this field experience the candidates are not expected to teach or interfere with the school's working. Rather, they only have to witness the life of a teacher through observation and interaction with working teachers.

Candidates for teacher training are rigorously selected from the top one third of graduating students from various educational institutions. (Bautista, A. Wong, J. & Gopinath, 2015).

Pre-Service Teacher Training

The aim of Pre-service teacher training in Singapore is to have teachers who are intentional towards teaching and have unity of beliefs, competencies and interest. (E. L. Low, Lim, Ch'ng, & Goh, 2011)

Student teachers are encouraged to be actively involved in research and stay technologically connected with the latest in information and knowledge in their respective disciplines of education system.

They are encouraged to be self-directed learners, collaborate to the system actively and adopt reflective practices.

At Pre-service teacher training it is mandatory for student teachers to do prolonged Field experience (Enhanced School Experience Programme), in schools. During this period, they act as co-teachers and are not given the full charge of teaching the students. They have to utilize this time in building rapport with the students and feel positive about the school system. (Ng, Lim, Low, & Hui, 2018)

During this period, also called as enhanced school experience, each student teacher is given a mentor teacher, who is an experienced teacher in the school. Only when the student teachers are believed to have gained confidence in their abilities, are they allowed to teach. Initially they teach

under the supervision of senior teachers before given the charge of independent teaching. (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

During pre-service teacher training the student teachers are given a stipend which is equal to the 60% of the salary of a beginning teacher.

The MoE funds the entire pre-service teacher education of the candidates. However, they are bound by a clause of working as a teacher for minimum 3 years after the training. If a candidate fails to do so, he has to repay the entire funding amount.

In-Service Teacher Training

In the beginning 1 year of service, teachers are only supposed to focus on their capacity building and awareness as teachers. There is no ambiguity in the roles and responsibilities of each teacher. (Mohamed, Valcke, & De Wever, 2017)

Teachers are required to possess a strong sense of teacher identity, service to the profession and community. (E.-L. Low & Tan, 2017)

They have to be responsive to student needs. They must display highest degree of professionalism as teachers. They are appraised annually and their appraisal is linked to students' performance. If found unfit teachers can be terminated from their services.

A teacher in Singapore has options of choosing from multiple pathways. (Goodwin, Low, & Ng, 2015)

- In Teaching pathway, teachers can become mentor teachers and coach new teachers and go upto becoming the school leader.
- In Specialist teacher pathway, teachers can become discipline specialists and help plan school curriculum and later go up to becoming the chief specialist curriculum developers.
- In Leadership pathway, they can enter School leadership do administrative roles regional roles and go upto the level of Director of Education in the Ministry.



Teachers are given ample opportunities for their in-service professional development so they can teach to higher standards and develop in their chosen pathway. NIE is the main professional development provider. Each teacher is allowed to devote 100 hours per year to his professional development.

Care is taken to support them in maintaining work life balance. They are allowed flexibility in order to fulfill family obligations.

Teachers can attach themselves to external agencies to broaden their perspectives or gain new perspectives as teachers. They are awarded monetarily for taking up part time study courses. They are encouraged to learn about diverse fields related to education and be parts of professional learning communities. (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012)

4. Learning from Singapore's Teacher Education System

- There is an enhanced and well-structured collaborative partnership between the Government (MoE), the teacher education institute (NIE) and the schools with a common goal of developing world class teachers.
- The candidates selected for teacher training programme are amongst the cream of their higher education institutes. This ensures that teachers have very sound subject matter knowledge and they just need to be developed as teaching professionals during teacher education programme.
- Before taking up Teacher Education training, aspiring candidates have to undergo a field experience in a school to identify if their true passion lies in teaching or not.
- Teaching is regarded as a highly respectable and sought-after profession because teacher education institutes put in conscious efforts to develop professional ethos in teachers that help them earn respect in the society.
- Teacher Education aims at developing teachers as reflective practitioners encouraging them to reconnect with the needs of their learners, time and again.

- Teachers are encouraged to take up research/ action research during

Pre as well as In-Service phase.

- Enhanced school experience programme during pre-service training allows would be teachers to orient themselves to the professional requirements of being a teacher.
- A beginning teacher is assigned a mentor and is not given full charge of teaching till it is seen that the teacher is ready to do so. It may take up to 30 weeks.
- Teachers are accountable for their students' performance and appraised basis that.
- Any In-Service teacher is supported monetarily and professionally, to take up programmes for their professional development.
- Different pathways are available for teachers for their career progression reaching upto national level high profile job opportunities and they are not restricted to routine mundane teaching for a lifetime.
- Very flexible and customized options are made available to the teachers to address their work-life balance needs.

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that non-performing and dissatisfied teachers are a waste of not only monetary resources but also of human resources. They impact the lives of their students, co-workers, parents and the society at large. The world has a lot to learn from Singapore's Teacher Education system with respect to producing, supporting and maintaining quality teachers that contribute to the nations growth.

The aim of bringing this to light is not to focus on the negatives of any particular education system but to look at the complementarity of various organizations and their perspectives that can be brought into practice for the betterment of educational practices at large. There is a lot to learn from Singapore's teacher system and incorporate certain practices as per local needs and demographics.

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